

Accountability and Transparency

Many critics of Islam have accused prominent Muslim groups and individuals of condoning or ignoring violence and diverting charitable funds to violent groups. Muslims for Progressive Values affirms that the most effective response to all criticisms is calm, reasoned discourse and open accountability. It should be self-evident that any and all public organizations should adhere to ethics of conduct that include transparency of responsibility and bookkeeping. We appreciate that such a simple, clear standard is complicated by mounting government secrecy, racism, Islamophobia, and xenophobia, but even with these considerations in mind, we affirm that organizational and financial transparency, and being open to constructive criticism are in the best interest of all organizations.

The Qur'an demands fair, open and ethical behavior in all business transactions. As one example, Verse 2:282 requires that financial transactions be made through witnessed, written contracts. Numerous other verses exhort believers to fulfill their contracts faithfully and testify honestly (see, e.g., Verses 4:135, 5: 89. or 5:108). Honesty, accountability, reliable bookkeeping, and dependability should be the hallmarks of Muslim organizations.

Some non-Muslims hold Muslim organizations to a standard higher than they observe themselves or demand of other groups. It is not the standard that is unfair, but the pressure that is based on prejudice. Nonetheless, as the Quran asserts, the lapses of others do not offer any excuse for lapses on our own part (see, for instance, Verse 5:8 which teaches Muslims that hatred or prejudice are never a reason to swerve from justice). The standards of accountability and transparency laid out in the Qur'an are the standards we should aim for, whether or not we receive approbation from the greater community, and whether or not they have different standards for Muslim versus non-Muslim organizations.

It is common for minority groups living with hostility from the mainstream community to circle the wagons and perceive any criticism or investigation as a form of attack. Often, but not always, that perception is correct. However, defensiveness and secrecy only contribute to fear and suspicion on both sides. **If we have nothing to hide, we should be able to demonstrate that clearly.** As with any public organization, our charter and lines of accountability, our books, our receipts and disbursements should be reasonably open and available for examination.

Calm response to any criticism, whether or not that criticism is fair, is consistent with Qur'anic exhortations to gentle discourse, rational debate, and the Islamic tradition of courtesy (see, for instance, 6:125). Not only does rational discourse fulfill Qur'anic ideals, but it presents the community in a favorable light, and illuminates the hostility behind ill-motivated attacks.

These principles go far beyond organizational proprieties. They extend to our ability to address larger issues. Yes, the crisis in Darfur has roots in neo-colonialism and global warming; yes, female genital mutilation and so-called "honor killings" are cultural practices and not really Islamic; but whatever the cause or scope of the problems in the community of believers we must be responsible and accountable if we are ever to solve them. Simply put, a problem involving Muslims, whether or not it is an Islamic issue, is a Muslim problem. It is never enough to neglect our internal housekeeping by making excuses or blaming others. We have a duty as Muslims to improve ourselves and our world. From the smallest problem to the most complex, we can only find solutions by being open and responsible.